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FRAMING AND COLLABORATION IN STORYTELLING EVENTS: FORGETFULNESS, REFLEXIVITY AND WORD SEARCH

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Abstract

The collaborative character of discourse has been studied for different activities and linguistic levels. The present article discusses the relevance of this perspective to a better understanding of storytelling events. The focus is on metadiscursive interactions that result from the teller's difficulty to evoke a word or linguistic form at a certain point of the story. Two different collaborative solutions are identified and analyzed, and its connections to framing and participation framework discussed.

Keywords: Storytelling; Discourse; Word search; Forgetfulness; Spanish; Framing; Participation framework; Reflexivity; Metadiscourse.

1. Introduction

In recent work in discourse analysis, different activities and discourse and linguistic units have been approached from the perspective of collaboration. Collaboration takes place between co-present participants engaged in such diverse activities as everyday conversation, language socialization, native-non-native encounters, co-narration, joke telling, and conversational storytelling (Duranti 1986; Jacoby and Ochs 1995; Lerner 1992; Sacks 1974; Goodwin and Goodwin 1986; Goodwin 1987). It has also been found to play a crucial role in seemingly more monologic kinds of events such as oratory and storytelling, where the audience participates through backchannel expressions, gaze and gestures, and other culturally available resources (Tedlock 1983; Duranti 1986). The study of textual cohesive devices and the host of discourse dimensions called "information flow" also reveals the speaker's effort to guide the interlocutor's interpretation (Tanskanen 2006; Chafe 1994), or, to use Linnell's (1998: 87) words, the "other-oriented" character of discourse.

For the present article, I approach forgetfulness and word search from a collaborative perspective involving co-present participants. More specifically, I focus on explicitly reflexive interactions that result from a storyteller's difficulty in evoking a word or linguistic form during the unfolding of the story, and discuss different collaborative solutions in relation to different framings and participation frameworks: (a) the contribution of a candidate form by members of the audience, (b) the requests for aid to members of the audience after several attempts to retrieve the appropriate word, and (c) overt negotiations between the teller and interlocutor as to the appropriateness of the

choice just made. While this analysis is closely related to those cases in which a sentence is co-constructed by two participants in the same interaction, my analysis goes further in that it shows how different possible solutions and forms of collaboration are put into play and what are the factors involved in each case.

In this respect, it takes advantage of previous work on forgetfulness, uncertainty, and word search in conversational narratives between close friends and family members (Goodwin and Goodwin 1986; Goodwin 1987). The present article differs from those earlier works, however, in that the events analyzed focus on the telling of traditional narratives in ethnographic encounters, in which a variety of settings, degrees of formality and relationships between the participants become relevant. A comparison between the events that make up my corpus evidences the need to approach forgetfulness, and the kind of collaboration it displays, in an interactional context that goes beyond the immediately previous exchanges. As Goodwin and Goodwin demonstrate, word search activity reveals the social identity of the participants and the kind of relationship they hold, at the same time that it involves a change of activity and a reconfiguration of the current participation framework. However, for the particular kind of events I analyze, in which two or more stories are successively recounted, the kind of collaboration put into play to overcome the difficulty to evoke a word at a particular point of a story can be related to the speaker-audience interaction as shaped in the telling of a previous or following story. More specifically, the audience's activity of searching for and contributing a candidate word that ultimately allows the teller to resume and successfully close a story should be seen in connection to other potential activities in which the audience can indeed engage, such as telling a whole story.

In addition, while I identify the two possibilities Goodwin (1987), Goodwin and Goodwin (1986) illustrate in their work - that is, either the speaker attempting to overcome the situation by himself, or rather engaging the audience in the word search (not only through verbal means, but also through gaze, a resource I don't analyze here) - I show that for traditional story-eliciting events, the specific choice also needs to be understood on the basis of (a) how the event as a whole is framed, and (b) the kind of relationship between the participants. My data show that, under certain circumstances, word search involves either the engagement of a non-ratified but knowing participant,¹ or the teller's choice of a candidate word, the meaning of which is, however, immediately opened to negotiation.

2. Theoretical background

The present analysis takes advantage of findings drawn from different fields and theoretical perspectives. On the one hand, it benefits directly from the study of co-construction (Duranti 1986; Jacoby and Ochs 1995), understood as "the joint creation of a form, interpretation, stance, action, activity, identity, institution, skill, ideology, emotion, or other culturally meaningful reality" (Jacoby and Ochs 1995: 171). In this respect, I am directly concerned with the joint creation of a form, more specifically a word. In order to understand the interactive nature of this linguistic unit, I demonstrate, it is necessary to attend to the event as a whole, and capture the crucial role of framing and participants' role configuration (Bateson 1972; Goffman 1974, 1981; Goodwin and

¹ Or *knowing recipient*, to use Goodwin's (1987) term.

Goodwin 1986; Goodwin 1987). In this respect, the present study approaches forgetfulness and collaboration in storytelling in a way comparable to those studies committed to the identification and discussion of the interactants' different responses to humor and irony, on the basis of the kind of activity, the degree of formality, and the kind of relationship held by the participants (Attardo 2002; Kothoff 2003).

This study, on the other hand, by being concerned with lexical choice, permits a better understanding of a longstanding issue for different disciplines, among them anthropology, linguistic anthropology, sociolinguistics, psychology, and, more recently, discourse studies. (Downing 1980). On the basis of narratives elicited in quasi experimental settings, a model that attempts to explain lexical choice was developed by Downing (1980), which highlights the complex interaction of cognitive, contextual (social and situational) and textual factors involved. Among the cognitive factors, low codability is identified as relevant to understanding the speaker's hesitations and deviations from the tendency to use morphemes with an intermediate degree of abstractness. For some of the data analyzed in the present study, low codability plays an important role in both the word search itself and the resulting reflexive interaction.²

Last, but not least important, I am also concerned with studies dealing with metalanguage, or, more specifically, with explicit reflexivity (Lucy 1993). To be more precise, the interactions studied here result from the storyteller's difficulty in invoking an appropriate word at a certain point of the story, or his uncertainty as to the interlocutor's agreement with the meaning of the chosen word. The resulting exchanges are explicitly reflexive to the extent that they involve, depending on the case, an overt negotiation of the meaning of the word proposed by the storyteller, or a careful characterization of the referent as a means to either come up with the missing word or to create the conditions for the contribution of the appropriate form by the interlocutor. This study shows that explicitly reflexive elements not only allow for a better understanding of discourse in the context of the broader interaction or event, as metanarrative comments do (Bauman and Briggs 1990; Bauman 1986; Hymes 1981), but that they themselves - whether we refer to their content or their form—are sensitive to the dynamics of the current interaction, and, in turn, have implications for framing broader interactional contexts.

3. Participants and data

The speech events I analyze involve the participation of authoritative storytellers, that is, narrators acknowledged as such in their communities and even beyond. The events studied here involve the telling of several traditional narratives that deal with the actions of mythological or legendary characters. The narratives are deemed *true stories*, as opposed to *non-true* or *entertainment stories* - to use the terms provided by some of the narrators - because the events recounted are considered as having actually occurred.

The three events I rely on were tape-recorded in Spanish in the Spring of 1990, as part of an extensive effort to gather traditional oral narratives in communities of the

² My own findings in previous research (Oropeza 2010) are consistent with these observations for traditional oral narratives. Indeed, it was my interest to discuss further Downing's model on the basis of a kind of narrative different from her data that encouraged the present analysis. The difference is that I am interested in the circumstances that allow participants to make a choice, rather than in the choice itself.

region of Papantla, in Northern Veracruz.³ The speakers were bilingual Totonac-Spanish storytellers, who come from various communities of the municipalities of Papantla and Zozocolco.⁴ It is important to note that besides the storyteller and myself (as a researcher), other participants were present, although not directly engaged as ratified participants in the storytelling event. Two out of the three examined events took place in the teller's home, while the third one was arranged by the local authority and took place in his home, although he did not attend in person.

4. Analysis

My commitment here is the analysis of those metalinguistic exchanges motivated by such factors as a failure to lexicalize an entity, event, or state at a certain point of the story, or the low codability (Downing 1980) of the referent and the consequent uncertainty as to the meaning attributed by the participants to the chosen word.

I study interactions that involve overt negotiation of the meaning of a word, and also some others that engage subtle collaboration, such as those cases in which a member of the audience produces a candidate word that allows the speaker to continue to tell the story. I discuss the contextual (in Downing's sense) and interactive factors responsible for the different treatments, and I show that, although the excerpts examined here share a similar purpose (that is, overcoming a felt communicative gap), aspects such as the setting, the degree of formality of the event, and the kind of relationship between the participants, as constructed before and during the current event, are closely related to the specific strategy put into play in each particular case.

As pointed out in previous work, (Goodwin and Goodwin 1986; Goodwin 1987) forgetfulness and uncertainty tend to involve a change in activity, so that word searching becomes the primary task and leads to a reorganization of the participation dynamics.

The word search activity as such can be characterized as reflexive. Reflexivity is understood here, following Lucy (1993), as the capacity and indeed the tendency of verbal interaction to presuppose, structure, represent, and characterize its own nature and functioning. Metalanguage and also metadiscourse, thus, either mark some kind of boundary involving the narrative as a whole, such as the abstract and coda narrative sections, or a specific discourse unit, such as the clause framing reported speech. It can also engage an overt reflection on a particular element or circumstance of the narrative or speech event, such as generic form, function, message, etc., or the story-telling event situation (participants, organization, actions) (Bauman and Briggs 1990; Bauman 1986; Hymes 1981). It is this latter kind of reflexivity, explicit reflexivity, that I approach here. Explicit reflexivity takes place when language form or use are made the subject matter of the ongoing speech, regardless of whether it is the code, a specific construction, or a larger discursive pattern that is at issue (Lucy 1993).

³ Part of those materials was analyzed, from a structuralist perspective, for my MA thesis (1996), with the results published later as Oropeza-Escobar (1999).

⁴ The communities from which the tellers come are Morgadal, San Antonio Ojital (both of them located in the municipality of Papantla) and Zozocolco de Hidalgo (located in the municipality of Zozocolco).

4.1. Overcoming forgetfulness: Speaker's invitation to aid in the word search

With the above considerations in mind, I would like to examine the first two events. In both cases, the teller addresses overtly one of the participants, whether ratified or not, in order to come up with the missing word. The two eliciting sessions took place in the storyteller's home, while other members of his family were engaged in their everyday duties. So, although the latter were physically present, they were not necessarily engaged in the event. In addition to the telling of traditional stories, the interaction between narrator and researcher characteristically involved brief exchanges. In those exchanges the researcher asked questions about specific details of the story, or encouraged the teller to recount another story, suggesting possible topics. The tellers, Don Luis and Don Felipe, come respectively from the municipalities of Papantla and Zozocolco, and are ninety one and seventy five years old.

In our first event, Don Luis is recounting a version of the flood myth, in which a rabbit warns a man of the upcoming flood and advises him to build a huge, woody container (called *aparato* "machine" by Don Luis), so that he and his family could save their lives. Also a pair of animals, male and female, of each existing species are advised to be taken to the container. Once the storm unchains, the level of the water rises consistently, until the container reaches the sky. When this happens, a parlor which was on the top hits its head against the sky. The sky, which is hot, burns the parlor's head, this being the reason why it is red nowadays.

At this point, the teller, unexpectedly for the researcher, starts to close the story. The latter, who is familiar with similar versions of the tale, asks him if the narrative ends once the water level has reached the sky. The teller and the researcher (myself, under the label *Mine* in what follows) interact consistently in a similar way throughout the event, the latter asking questions or clarifications as necessary in order to fully understand the story.

Excerpt 1⁵

1 Don Luis: *Sí y así.. así sé de ese cuento,*
 AFF and so so know.1SG.PRES of DEM.MASC.SG.MASC.SG story
mh.
 AFF
 'Yes, and that's, that's what I know from that tale.'

2 Mine: *¿Y ya termina entonces en que llegan al*
 and already end.3SG.PRES so in that arrive.3PL.PRES to.the.MASC.SG
cielo?
 sky.MASC.SG
 'So, it ends ((REFERING TO THE STORY)) when they reach the sky?'

3 Don Luis: *Sí*
 AFF
 'Yes.'

4 Mine: *¿Pero ya no... bajan después?*
 but already NEG go.down.3PL.PRES later
 'But, didn't they go down later?'

⁵ The transcription and glossing conventions are provided in appendix 1 and appendix 2, respectively, at the end of this article.

- 5 Don Luis: *Bajaron.. bajaron.*
 go.down.3PL.PST go.down.3PL.PST
 'They went down; they did.'

Once the point rose by the researcher is clarified, the teller explains that the water level lowered only gradually. In the meantime, a bird is sent from heaven to see what is happening on earth. However, the bird fails to accomplish its mission, because it stops to eat dead animals, and becomes so heavy that it cannot fly. A second bird was sent later. It is at this point in the unfolding of the story that Don Luis fails to invoke the next word, that is, the name of the bird. He first compares the bird to another, similar one. But since he cannot invoke its name either, he proceeds to describe the animal, mentioning its color and the fact that it belongs to a species common in the surrounding area.

Excerpt 2

- 1 Don Luis: *Y luego mandaron este... el este...*
 and later send.3PL.PST I.mean DEF.MASC.SG I.mean
 'And then they sent...I mean...'
- 2 *otro animal que se llama,*
 another.MASC.SG animal. SG that PSREF be.called.3SG.PRES
 'the...another animal called'
- 3 *...el animal que mandaron a seguirlo.*
 DEF.MASC.SG animal.MASC.SG that send.3PL.PST to follow.INF.DAT.MASC.SG
 '...the animal that they sent to follow it'
- 4 *Es un animal pare- en forma del..*
 be.3SG.PRES one.MASC.SG animal..SG simi- in shape.FEM.SG of.the.MASC.SG
 'It's an animal that looks li-...it resembles.'
- 5 *en forma del este,*
 in shape.FEM.SG of.the.MASC.SG I.mean
 'it resembles..I mean,'
- 6 *...de otro que también no distinguía,*
 of another.one.MASC.SG that also NEG distinguish.3SG.IPFV
 '...another which couldn't differentiate either,'
- 7 *que hay mucho animal aquí,*
 that there.be.SG many animal.SG here
there are a lot of them here.
- 8 *ése es color negro.*
 DEM. MASC.SG be.3SG.PRES color.SG black.MASC.SG
 'It's black.'

Since, in spite of his effort, he cannot come up with the bird's name, he overtly addresses Paco, his son, who, although was in the room, had not been directly engaged in the interaction before, that is, as ratified addressee. Paco, who, judging on his quick and precise answer had obviously been following the story, provides the exact linguistic form:

Excerpt 3 ((CONTINUATION OF EXCERPT 2))

- 9 Don Luis: ¿Cómo se llaman esos,
how PSREF be.called.3PL.PRES DEM.MASC.PL
'What's the name for those...' ((ADDRESSING HIS SON))
- 10 Don Luis: ..esos animales que hay aquí?
DEM.MASC.PL animal.PL that there.be.3SG here
'those animals that there's a lot here?'
- 11 Paco: Tordo.
thrush.MASC.SG
'Thrush.'
- 12 Don Luis: ¿Eh?
what
'Excuse me?'
- 13 Paco: El tordo.
DEF.MASC.SG thrush
'The thrush'
- 14 Mine: ¡Ah..el tordo!
I.see DEF.MASC.SG thrush
'I see..the thrush!'
- 15 Don Luis: ¡Tordo!
thrush
'Thrush!'

Thus, in this case, Don Luis, given the characteristics of the interaction and the familiar setting, freely turns to a close member of his family - a non-ratified, but knowing participant, to use Goodwin's (1987) term - in order to find the appropriate form and keep the event going. Once Paco has contributed the missing word, Don Luis is able to continue to tell and finally close the story. Interestingly, as Goodwin (1987) points out, the word search activity usually involves a reorganization of the participants' role configuration. In this particular case, this means the engagement of a non-ratified participant in the current interaction. As Goodwin (1997: 118) also notes, the social identity of the participants is displayed, so that the kind of relationship the participants hold is relevant to understanding the resulting interaction. In this particular case, the relationship of father/son plays an important role, but also the status of the latter as a knowing participant.

4.2. Low codability and participant's negotiation of lexical meaning

Let us examine another interactive solution to a potential communicative gap involving lexical choice. The event at issue took place, as the previous one, in the teller's home, while some (female) members of his family were talking and cooking in the contiguous room, not necessarily following the story. The interaction between Don Felipe and myself involved exchanges, with me asking questions about the previous narrative, or trying to come up with topics that could be the focus of a story. Indeed, the event I will

refer to, took place during my second visit to Don Felipe. Then, he first told in Totonac a story dealing with a flower called *cempoaxóchitl*⁶ (which is used to honor dead people, especially early in November) and the corresponding version in Spanish. After a brief exchange focused on different kinds of altars (where such flowers are used), I ask him if he knows another story he would like to tell, and after a brief pause I suggest, as a possible topic, how people in his community conceive of the world, what its shape and overall characteristics are. It is in this interactive context, that Don Felipe recounts how the world was created by God.

Excerpt 4

- 1 Don Felipe: *Ah pues el mundo,*
oh well DEF.MASC.SG world
'Well, the world,'
- 2 *nadie le conoce cómo estaba.*
nobody DAT.3SG know.3SG.PST how be.3SG.IPFV
'nobody knows how it was.'
- 3 *Dicen que Dios fue,*
say.3PL.PRES that god be.3SG.PST
'They ((REFERRING TO PEOPLE)) say that it was God,'
- 4 *el que lo sacó de la nada.*
DEF.SG.MASC that ACC.MASC SG. take.out.3SG.PST out.of nothing
'who created it from (out of) nothing.'
- 5 *Adonde lo sacó no había nada.*
from.where ACC.MASC SG take.out.3SG.PST NEG there.be.3SG.IPFV nothing
'There was nothing in the place he took it from'
- 6 *Eso quiere decir,*
DEM.MASC.SG want.3SG.PRES say.INF
'That means,'
- 7 *que él fue el que lo hizo...*
that he be.3SG.PST DEF.MASC.SG that ACC.MASC.SG make.3SG.PST
lo formó
ACC.MASC.SG create.3SG.PST
'that it was him who made it, who created it.'

And then Don Felipe adds,

Excerpt 5 ((CONTINUATION OF EXCERPT 4))

- 8 Don Felipe: *Que la tierra estaba deshecha,*
that DEF.FEM.SG earth be.3SG.IPFV un+done
'That earth was undone,'
- 9 *dicen.*
say.3PL.PRES
'they say.'

⁶ The word is a borrowing from Náhuatl consistently used in Spanish.

- 10 *Cuando la acabaron de hacer.*⁷
when ACC.FEM.SG finish.3PL.PRES of do.INF
'When they finish to make it,'
- 11 *la tierra estaba deshecha,*
DEF.FEM.SG earth be.3SG.IPFV un+done
'earth was undone'
- 12 *dicen.*
say.3PL.PRES
'they say.'

At this point, he opens an exchange, by overtly reflecting on the meaning of the word he has just uttered, that is *deshecha* ('undone').

Excerpt 6 ((CONTINUATION OF EXCERPT 5))

- 13 Don Felipe: *¿Qué le entiendes tú*
what DAT.SG understand.2SG.PRES 2SG
'What does it mean for you' ((ADDRESSING THE RESEARCHER))
- 14 *que estaba deshecha la tierra?*
that be.3SG.IPFV un+done DEF.FEM.SG earth
'that earth was undone?'
- 15 Mine: *¿Deshecha?*
un+done
'Undone?'
- 16 *Que estaba... por pedacitos.*
that be.3SG.IPFV by piece.DIM.PL.
'That it was... smashed into small pieces.'

Once he gets an answer, he proceeds to explain what the meaning of the word is for him, thereby making clear the way he will use it throughout the narrative.

Excerpt 7 ((CONTINUATION OF EXCERPT 6))

- 17 Don Felipe: *Este...yo le entiendo,*
well 1SG DAT.3SG understand
'Well...what I understand by'
- 18 *que estaba deshecha la tierra,*
that be.3SG.COP un+done DEF.FEM.SG earth
'"earth was undone"',
- 19 *que no había nada,*
that NEG there.be.3SG.IPFV nothing
'is that there was nothing (on it)'
- 20 *que no había nada,*
that NEG there.be.3SG. IPFV nothing
'is that there was nothing (on it)'

⁷ In Spanish there is only one verb, *hacer*, for the two English verbs "do" and "make".

- 21 *Ni hierbas... nada.*
 nor herb.PL nothing
 ‘(There was) no plants...nothing.’
- 22 *Estaba así... como..como un desierto.*
 be.3SG. IPFV like.this like like INDEF.MASC.SG desert
 ‘It was like, like a desert.’

As we can see, before a felt ambiguity or potential misunderstanding, ultimately derived from the low codability of the concept to verbalize, the narrator does not hesitate to overtly ask the researcher for her interpretation, in order to negotiate its meaning. In this case, it is not a member of his family that the narrator addresses, but his interlocutor, the researcher. Interestingly, in order to keep the narrative and the event going, what the narrator deems crucial is sharing the meaning of the chosen linguistic form. Although he was able to find a candidate form by himself, he judges that such form could be understood in a different sense from the intended one. As we will see, the nature and setting of the interaction and the relationship between the participants are crucial to this solution.

4.3. Audience's spontaneous contribution of a candidate form

In order to explain how the relationship between the participants and other features of the event relates to the process of choosing a particular lexical item in the course of telling a story, I would like to show a contrasting framing and participation structure. The specific event under description differs from the previous two, both in the setting and in the kind of interaction between the ratified participants. In this case, the storyteller was not first reached by the researcher, but rather by the local authority (*agente municipal*), who had been previously informed by myself about the purpose of the study. Under this circumstance, he took the initiative to invite three storytellers to meet at his home, so that I could gather relevant materials. He also asked a person closely related to him to attend. The event began with small talk outside the recorded material, in which one of the storytellers (Don José) and myself were introduced by the *agente municipal*'s representative (Don Pedro) and spoke about the storyteller's personal background and the agrarian regional situation, in which he had been involved as a local representative. During the small talk the storyteller was given the reasons for the meeting and asked to tell the traditional stories he knew.

The other two storytellers arrived at the *agente municipal*'s house after the agreed time, when Don José had, indeed, started to tell stories. Thus, the entire speech event includes brief moments in which other participants take turns - without necessarily engaging properly in a conversation - as well as long periods of narration on behalf of Don José. Once each narrative began to be told, however, no interruption or answer was carried out by the audience, except, as mentioned above, (a) when the two storytellers joined the group and addressed the audience through a greeting (which was answered by the participants), or (b) for technical reasons (for example, the ending and substitution of the recording tapes or making sure that the recorder was working fine and located in the right place). The latter circumstance shows the participants' high awareness and importance they attributed to the tape-recorder, and the potential audience reached through it. As can be seen in excerpt 8, below, the presence of the tape-recorder actually prompts a turn from the other participants, in spite of the fact that Don Nemesio had

already started to tell his first story.

Excerpt 8

- 1 Don Nemesio: *Pues... antes del diluvio,*
 well before of.DEF.MASC.SG deluge
 ‘Well, before the deluge,’
- 2 *vivía un... este.. un huérfano.*
 live.3SG.IPFV INDEF.MASC.SG I.mean an orphan.MASC.SG
 ‘lived a...I mean, an orphan.’
- 3 *Y ese huérfano...*
 and DEM.MAS.SG orphan
 ‘And that orphan...’

((NOISE OF SOMEBODY PUSHING A CHAIR)).

- 3 Don Pedro: *Se va a caer.*
 PSREF go.3SG.PRES to fall.down.INF
 ‘It is going to fall down.’
- 4 Don Nemesio: *No se cae.*
 NEG PSREF fall.down.3SG.PRES
 ‘It won’t fall down.’

After this exchange, and having made sure that the tape-recorder was safely located, three tales were narrated by Don Nemesio. The first one refers to the origins of the Old Thunder, a major mythological figure in the Totonac culture, associated to the deluge. The second one recounts the origin of the Sun, another major figure in the Totonac mythology. Finally, the third narrative offers an interpretation of the life of Jesus, Mary and Joseph.

During the telling of the Old Thunder story, Don Nemesio is recounting the great difficulties the Thunders had in catching the boy who, by wearing a forbidden costume and sword, had unchained the deluge. At this point in the narrative, the Thunders’ mother arrives. But, in attempting to provide relevant information about the Thunders’ mother through a metanarrative comment, Don Nemesio misses the appropriate word (lines 7-8). Under these circumstances Don Pedro suggests a possible wording (line 9), which Don Nemesio accepts (line 10), thereby immediately re-establishing the telling of the story.

Excerpt 9 ((CONTINUATION OF EXCERPT 8))

- 4 Don Nemesio: *Llega.*
 arrive.3SG.PRES
 ‘She arrives.’
- 5 *Llega la nanita.*
 arrive.3SG.PRES DEF.FEM.SG old.woman.DIM
 ‘The old woman arrives.’
- 6 Don Nemesio/Metanarrator: *...La nanita no era cualquiera,*
 DEF.FEM.SG old.woman.DIM NEG be.3SG.IPFV anybody
 ‘...the nanita was not just anybody,’

- 7 *tenía* *su...* *era...* *digo,*
 have.3SG.IPFV POSS.3SG be.3SG.COP say.1SG.PRES
 ‘she had..it was..I mean,’
- 8 *pues tenía* *su...* *su*
 well have.3SG.IPFV POSS.3SG POSS.3SG
 ‘well she had her..her’.
- 9 Don Pedro: *Tenía* *poderes.*
 have.3SG.IPFV power.PL
 ‘She had her powers.’
- 10 Don Nemesio: *Poder...sí.*
 power AFF
 ‘Power, yes.’
- Y dice,*
 and say.3SG.PRES
 ‘And she says,’
- 11 Don Nemesio/Old woman: *¡Pues agárrenlo!*
 well grab.2PL.IMP.ACC.MASC.SG
 ‘Well grab it!’

By contributing a candidate word (*poderes* “powers”), on the basis of Don Nemesio’s previous syntactic structure (*tenía su...* “she has her”), Don Pedro allows Don Nemesio to keep the current story and the speech event going.

Among the factors that presumably made it possible for Don Pedro to help overcome the situation, are the narrator’s careful description of the actions and characters in the narrative, and Don Pedro’s own knowledge of the overall content of the narrative. Although he was born in Papantla city, he has lived in the community for many years, and might have become familiar with the local version.

But in order to fully understand the dynamics of the event at issue, we need to take into account the interplay, or even overlap, of at least two additional frames and participation structures. On the one hand, some features of a traditional storytelling event were invoked, for example, through the fact that the recounted stories are a significant component of the oral tradition in the region and that Don Nemesio was a recognized storyteller in his community. On the other hand, the event can also be viewed as an official meeting, given the setting where the gathering took place (the *agente municipal*’s home) and the direct intervention of the local authority in its organization. Since the participants, the place and the time of the encounter were previously decided on and arranged under the supervision of the local authority, there was significant divergence from the spontaneous context (social situation and setting) in which the oral narratives usually occur, including the use of the tape-recorder.⁸

To all these factors, another one can be added that deals with Don Nemesio’s personal background: he participated in a storytelling competition held in the

⁸ The use of tape recording has been documented as strongly influential on the dynamics of the narrating events at different levels. Thus, according to Bauman (1986: 105), the act of recording itself contributes to and upholds the sense that larger audiences of strangers are implicated, even in one-to one sessions with the fieldworker. Tedlock (1983: 200) shows how during the recording sessions the audience members avoid speaking to the narrators even within the confines of the culturally allowed responses.

neighboring city of Papantla, in 1964. Such competition was directed by a federal educational agency in order to enhance the local language and culture, and to collect a sample of oral narratives both in Totonac and in Spanish. This circumstance suggests that he is familiar with public events focused on storytelling elicitation, and might feel more comfortable with this kind of events than the other participants. On the other hand, the fact that it was Don Pedro, rather than the other storytellers who attended the meeting, who contributed the missing word, is, in my view, not only attributable to his overall knowledge of the plot and his close attention to Don Nemesio's recount. As mentioned above, Don Pedro keeps a close relationship with the *agente municipal*, and was, to that extent, committed to the success of the event. Viewed this way, his collaboration with Don Nemesio is easy to understand.

That these factors are not irrelevant is shown by attending to the following excerpt in which a similar situation occurs later in the coda section of the narrative, and a similar pattern emerges.

Excerpt 10

- 1 Don Nemesio/Metanarrator: *Que si ese señor poderoso -se*
 that if DEM.MASC.SG lord powerful.MASC.SG PSREF
puede decir,
 can.3SG.PRS say.INF
 'If that powerful lord -you could say',
- 2 *gritara más según la leyenda no?*
 yell.3SG.FUT.SUBJ more according.to DEF. FEM.SG legend NEG
 'would yell more -according to the legend, right?'
- 3 *voltearía la mar,*
 turn.3SG.IRR DEF.FEM.SG sea
 'It would turn the sea upside down,'
- 4 *pero como también está,*
 but like also be.3SG.PRES
 'but, since he is also,'
- 5 *...cómo te dijera yo?*
 how DAT.2SG say.1SG.PRES.SUBJ 1SG
 '... how could I say?'
- 6 *Está=,*
 be.3SG.PRES
 'He is...'
- 7 Don Pedro: *Sometido.*
 subject.PART.MASC.SG
 'Subjected.'
- 8 Don Nemesio/Metanarrator: *Sometido por los demás,*
 subject.PART.MASC.SG by DEF.MASC.PL other.PL
 'Subjected by the others,'
- 9 *entonces él grita.*
 so 3SG yell.3SG.PRES
 'so he yells,'

- 10 *Pero está boca abajo,*
but be.3SG.PRES mouth down
'But he is facedown,'
- 11 *allá quien sabe adónde.*
there who know.3SG.PRES where
'over there, who knows where.'

However, the limits of such collaboration are evident when, at the end of the second narrative Don Nemesio indirectly (that is, without addressing them through second person pronominal form, but using the singular third person) encouraged the participants to take the floor in order to gain some planning time (as he explicitly points out):

Excerpt 11

- 1 Don Nemesio: *Pues a ver aquí, don Pedro,*
well to see.INF here mister Pedro
'Well, let's see, Mr. Pedro,'
- 2 *a ver que,*
to see.INF what
'he should...'
- 3 *..O mi compadre,⁹*
or POSS.1SG compadre
'..Or my compadre,'
- 4 *que pongan algo de su parte mientras pienso.*
that put.3PL.PRES.SUBJ something of POSS.3SG behalf while think.1SG.PRES
'he should go ahead and contribute something while I think.'

Since they remained silent, thereby subtly refusing the invitation, Don Nemesio proceeded to tell the third and last narrative. Once the third story was told, he suggested a second meeting to continue the eliciting task, since it was getting late in the afternoon.¹⁰

All of these elements help us understand how lexical choice may be negotiated in this kind of highly performative events, and how the strategy put into play to overcome possible communicative gaps or referential ambiguity is intimately related to the nature of the broader interaction and participation frameworks involved.

In the discussion of this third interaction, we considered in detail the factors that constrain participants' collaboration to a subtle one. Interestingly, it is the same participant - who can be seen as the local authority's representative - that is involved in the suggestion of the appropriate word in all of the extracts. In each case, the word suggested is immediately taken by the teller, and the narrative is successfully closed later. It is worth noting, however, that he is careful, not to commit further - he does not volunteer to tell a whole story, for example - although he is explicitly invited to take the

⁹ In a very general sense, the term *compadre* refers to the godparents of one's child, someone who agrees to be morally responsible for a child or young, according to the catholic tradition.

¹⁰ The announced meeting effectively took place a week later but it will not be discussed in the present paper.

floor (line 1).¹¹

Thus, the high degree of formality of this event, to which the setting and the local authority's involvement contributes - as well as the full narrative competence required of the performers - shapes the interaction in a particular, highly constraining, way.

5. Concluding remarks

My analysis shows the relevance of undertaking the study of forgetfulness and word choice from a broader perspective than previous work has done. The analysis of explicitly reflexive exchanges demonstrates the need to identify a variety of situational and social factors, as well as personal backgrounds, that play a role in the interactive and collaborative construction of storytelling events through word choice. It also demonstrates the interaction between the specific means displayed to overcome forgetfulness and the participants' potential engagement in other activities that involve a broader narrative competence. My analysis also evidences that in storytelling events the joint activity of searching for a word needs to be approached in the context of the previous story or stories, or even the whole event, rather than the immediately preceding or following interaction. I have examined cases involving more than one instance of forgetfulness in the same event, which exhibit similarities in the treatment provided by the participants, on the basis of shared framing and participation framework features.

The word search is either overtly negotiated, or collaboration explicitly requested, with the word search activity resulting in a relatively long exchange, in those contexts in which the event takes place in a familiar, everyday setting, with intimates engaged in their daily duties, and the interaction with the researcher involving regular turn exchanges. In this kind of storytelling events, the means to come up with the appropriate lexical form can engage not only the participation of ratified members of the audience, but also the engagement of non-ratified, but knowing speakers.

In more formal contexts, in which other qualified, potentially competitive, tellers participate, and the local authority is involved in the organization of the event, I find that the teller attempts to solve the situation by less overt means. In this context of full performance, with strong awareness of the evaluative power of the audience projected by the tape-recorder beyond the immediate event, the participants' collaboration is indeed constrained to the linguistically narrow, but interactionally crucial, limits of a word.

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¹¹This can be seen, from a different perspective, as a disclaimer of performance (Bauman 1977, 1993).

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Appendix 1: Transcription conventions

| | |
|---------------------------|--|
| Don Nemesio: | The speaker in his role of narrator |
| Don Nemesio/The prince: | The speaker animating a character (in this case, the prince) |
| Don Nemesio/Metanarrator: | The speaker in his role of metanarrator |
| Excerpt 1 | Excerpt numbering |
| 1 | Line number |
| 2 | |
| (()) | Researcher's comment |
| ... | Pause |
| Tenía= | Vowel lengthening |
| Pare- | Truncated word |
| <i>Llega la nanita.</i> | Spanish version |
| 'The old woman arrives.' | English translation |
| -- ¿? ¡! | Hyphens, question and exclamation marks are employed according to Spanish orthography. |
| . | Final intonation contour. |
| , | Continuing intonation contour. |

Appendix 2: Glossing Symbols

| | |
|------|---------------|
| 1 | first person |
| 2 | second person |
| 3 | third person |
| ACC | Accusative |
| AFF | Affirmation |
| DAT | Dative |
| DIM | Diminutive |
| FEM | Feminine |
| IMP | Imperative |
| INF | Infinitive |
| IPFV | Imperfective |
| IRR | Irrealis |
| MASC | Masculine |
| NEG | Negation |
| POSS | Possessive |
| PART | Participle |
| PL | Plural |
| PRES | Present tense |

| | |
|-------|--------------------------------------|
| PST | Past tense |
| PSREF | Pseudoreflexive |
| SG | Singular |
| SUBJ | Subjunctive |
| DEF | Definite article |
| INDEF | Indefinite article |
| + | Morphological boundary ¹² |

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¹² Only used when the identification of morphological boundaries is relevant to the analysis.